

# Surfing Australia

Greater precision to drive better performance

## About Surfing Australia

Surfing Australia is a National Sporting Organization formed in 1963 to establish, guide, and promote the development of surfing in Australia. It is the representative body on the International Surfing Association (ISA), of which there are 86 member countries, and is recognized by the Australian Sports Commission, the Australian Olympic Committee, and is a member of the Water Safety Council of Australia. The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) leads and enables a united and collaborative high performance sport system that supports Australian athletes to achieve international podium success.



### Opportunity

Boasting a rich heritage and hundreds of miles of pristine beaches, Australia is recognized as one of the true pioneers in world surfing. With the sport being added to the Olympics for the first time at the Tokyo Games, the country's national governing body saw a chance to work with the Australian Institute of Sport to improve the preparation of its competitors for international competition through better athlete data management.



### Challenge

The main obstacle to Surfing Australia successfully implementing an athlete management system (AMS) was that its elite surfers are distributed across a vast country when they're at home and spread across the globe when they're competing and training abroad. As surfing is more subjective than objective data-driven sports like cycling and its preparation involves a greater number of variables, it was also difficult to decide which athlete information would help surfers and their coaches best prepare for world tour and Olympic competitions.



### Solution

As part of the AIS network, Surfing Australia's coaches already had access to their athletes' medical profiles and injury status updates uploaded by physiotherapists, team doctors, and other service providers. The Smartabase platform also enables the coaching staff to work hand-in-hand with their athletes to create detailed individual performance plans (IPPs) that include a skill matrix, videos, details on pre-competition preparation, physical and mental attributes, competition strategy, and more. For dry land training, strength and conditioning coaches have begun integrating Smartabase with performance testing products from VALD, TeamBuildr, and GymAware.



### Impact

Maintaining detailed IPPs in Smartabase helps coaches deliver more personalized and precise direction and increases athlete accountability. The ability to analyze data alongside videos and monitor each surfer's progress elevates the effectiveness of case management meetings. A communication feed provides real-time updates on injuries, medical issues, and other information, which keeps the entire staff on the same page. Targeting surfers' specific weaknesses allows the allocation of funding to intensive strike missions that turn them into strengths.



# The Opportunity



*Even with surfing being a more subjective sport, we believed we could capture meaningful data from our athletes around the globe that could help us make better decisions and improve their performance.*

*- Eric Haakonssen, Performance Support and Podium Manager, Surfing Australia*



When he served as the senior physiologist for the AusCycling, Australia's national governing body for cycling, Eric Haakonssen provided sports science support for the high-performance BMX and road cycling teams. During this time, he saw how managing athlete data could drive a collaborative approach that prepared cyclists to win Olympic and world championship medals and excel in elite tour events. So when Haakonssen joined Surfing Australia, he was eager to apply a similar approach to some of the best surfers on the planet.

During his tenure with AusCycling and the AIS, Haakonssen helped prepare athletes for three Olympic cycles. Surfing made its debut at the Tokyo Olympics and Surfing Australia was eager to target the podium as it looked ahead to the 2024 Games in Paris. With this in mind, Haakonssen collaborated with his colleagues at AIS to find

the best ways to apply data management best practices via the Smartabase AMS that is used across many different sports. Doing so successfully not only offered the potential of better preparing surfers for the Olympics, but also for three different tours. When considering how to best create individual performance plans (IPPs) for each surfer, Haakonssen had to first take into account the differences between the discipline and a more objective one like cycling.

"At AusCycling, a lot was based on numbers like watts per kilo and lab testing," Haakonssen said. "That is a very data-rich sport. But surfing is so subjective. How do you capture the quality of a backhand snap with any sort of meaningful data? It has to be done subjectively."



# The Challenge



*The biggest challenge has been how spread out our surfers are. But once they're set up, therein lies the power of Smartabase: when they are remote, our athletes have access to this tool that they can use from anywhere.*

When trying to implement any new technology, Surfing Australia is faced with the unique logistical difficulties that its sport presents. "The thing that's really challenging with surfing is that it's an individual sport and we're decentralized, so we have athletes who are based all around the globe," Haakonssen said. "Our surfers are competing on three different tours, from ages 12 and into their 30s. Even when they are back in Australia, they're all over the country."

To overcome such a challenge, Haakonssen and the Surfing Australia team decided to roll out the Smartabase performance platform in a phased approach that would be easier to grasp for surfers and

staff alike. "We made a point of having a standalone time to make sure everyone can log in and do their IPP [individual performance plan]," Haakonssen said. "We'll review it with them afterwards. I present Smartabase as a whole suite of tools that you can access in this platform, but today, we're just going to do this one thing. Down the road, we'll do the medical screen, and then we'll roll out the load monitoring component."





# The Solution



*The performance planning section of what Surfing Australia has set up is one of the better ones we've got within the network, and we're actually basing other sports off what we've achieved in that space.*



As with many other sports that collaborate with the AIS, the athlete data management project at Surfing Australia began with collecting athletes' medical data in Smartabase. Since then, Haakonssen has worked closely with both the AIS's technical team and Fusion Sport to create more surfing-specific use cases.

identify areas surfers are progressing and those with opportunity for improvement.

"The skill-focused IPP provides quite a nice little one-page report with a radar plot," Haakonssen said. "It's a good way to make things clear to the athlete and their coaches. The skill matrix shows the areas where there's a bit of a gap, and we set some priorities off the back of that."

## Individual Performance Plans

One of the ways Surfing Australia is utilizing Smartabase to manage its athlete development program is by creating individual performance plans. Each surfer's roadmap has several IPPs that relate to a different aspect of their preparedness as they compete on world tours and target the 2024 Olympics and other international contests.

Another IPP focuses on pre-competition preparation. It gives the performance team a breakdown of a surfer's wave and location knowledge, their relationship with board shapers, and details about boards and safety for different conditions. This information helps coaches and other staff keep tabs on athlete readiness and make changes if needed to ensure they're ready to train and compete anywhere in the world.

The first IPP provides a surfer's complete skill profile. This includes all the maneuvers they can perform, what conditions they can do them in, and whether they can execute them going left, right, or both. It's integrated with the CoachNow system, enabling staff to use tags to search for a certain trick and see if the athlete has recently uploaded a video of themselves performing it. This allows them to

"Then we have an additional IPP for competition," Haakonssen said. "This includes the athlete's warmup routine and whether they have a mental performance plan. Tactically, how well do they perform? And then we have one that's purely based on their physical performance or capacities. We involve the strength and conditioning coach and a physio as well as the surf coach in that."



## Injury Management

Even before Haakonssen joined Surfing Australia, the organization was using Smartabase to manage surfers' health and injuries. If an athlete gets hurt, they can be treated by in-house members of the medical team or an AIS-approved provider. And no matter where they are, their data follows them, eliminating the need for time-consuming information requests.

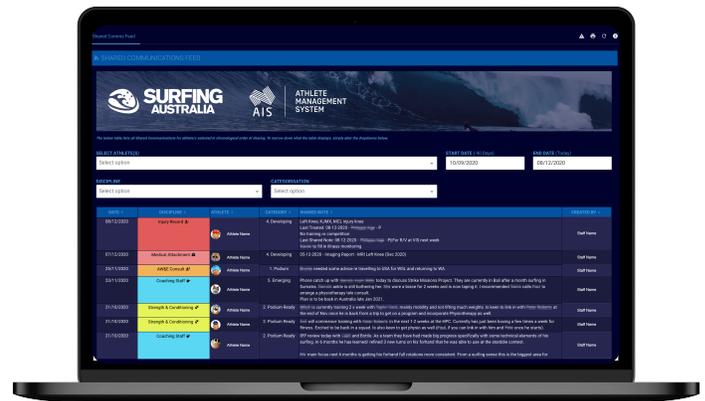
“The physios and medical staff are doing a good job of uploading all their notes and reports and centralizing them so that if an athlete moves from a state institute to a sport and back, all their data carries across quite nicely,” Haakonssen said.

Surfing Australia also utilizes wellness forms in a unique way. Rather than having athletes fill out a daily questionnaire as some organizations do, they only enter symptoms in an IPP form if they suffer a concussion or other injury so the medical and coaching staff can be made aware of an ongoing issue and take the necessary steps to remedy it.

## Communication Feed

Often in a national governing body, coaches and other staff must hunt down individual pieces of information and then put them together to track an athlete's progress or get an update on their injury. Smartabase removes the guesswork, putting all relevant information into a centralized feed that is updated in real time.

“Whenever we have meetings and someone talks about how this or that point has come up with an athlete, they email a report when they want to share it with the group,” Haakonssen said. “I always try and steer them back to Smartabase and encourage people to keep the shared comms feed up. It's always open in their browser and even if they're not looking at it daily, just checking it a couple of times a week will give them all the updates relating to medical or injury. I put the notes from our case management meetings in there as well.”



## Sports Psychology

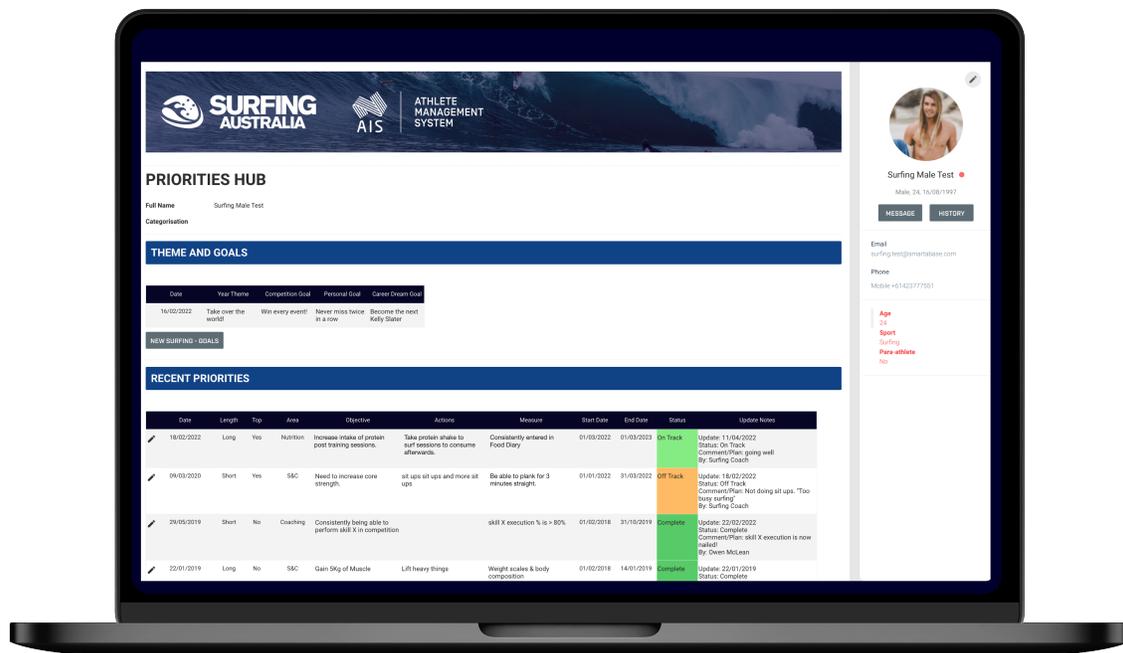
Surfing is as much mental as it is physical, and Surfing Australia is committed to developing its athletes' mental game. One of the forms they built in Smartabase is logging the practical exercises surfers do with the team's sports psychologist as part of a mental performance in competition (MPC) program. “In a six-to-eight-week block of workshops, the athletes have a slightly stressful exercise that they do on the beach,” Haakonssen said. “Next, they go into the water and have to catch, say, two waves in a 10-minute period, and then come back in and complete the skill again. After that, they enter a self-rating in a form via the Smartabase app.”





# Athlete Agendas

The modern athlete doesn't just compete in their sport but is also a distinct personal brand. That's why Surfing Australia built a comprehensive agenda form in Smartabase enabling each surfer to enter details about their life skills, sponsorships, media engagements, and so on. "The agenda is analogous to the skill matrix that captures information for the surf coaches. We have a wellbeing and engagement manager who can work with an athlete if they have life skills they need to develop and a dietitian to help them upskill in that space," Haakonssen said. "Or if they've got poor financial literacy, we can help them out with courses or do some media training if that's been a weakness. It's more of these things that sit outside of the actual sport, but still have an impact on performance."



# Strength and Conditioning and Performance Testing

While physical testing might not be as intensive in surfing as in some other sports, it's still useful for the performance staff to obtain benchmarks to measure athletes' progress. Surfing Australia is in the process of integrating Smartabase with velocity-based training (VBT), strength and conditioning, and force plate technology so they can better develop dry-land capabilities that cross over into the water. "The Smartabase Kiosk app is used more in the gym. iPads have been set up so our S&C coaches can use those with the suite of VALD equipment, as well as GymAware," Haakonssen said.

Surfing Australia is also using a Smartabase dashboard to display the results of paddle testing conducted in a pool, such as peak velocity and the time taken to sprint for five and 10 meters. Athletes can see their own targets and a reference standard.



# The Impact



*Smartabase is keeping us on point in terms of delivering on what we said we were going to do. It's also helping each athlete be accountable for the priorities they identify needing to work on, and aligning that to clear performance outcomes.*

Having access to IPPs for each surfer enables Surfing Australia to direct its resources in a more targeted way than if such information was stuck in a silo.

“Smartabase helps us link surfers’ IPP priorities to the funding we have. We have funds allocated to what we call strike missions,” Haakonssen said. “This involves a surfer going to a location for several days to get exposure to a wave profile that they can’t get at home. So let’s say it’s left-hand barrels – that’s got really clear Olympic relevance because the wave profile at Paris 2024 is going to be a left-hand barrel.”

Another benefit of the performance team having access to current IPPs in Smartabase is that staff members in different roles can collaborate effectively with the same information in front of them. Every two to three weeks we hold a case management meeting,” Haakonssen said. “We’ll pick five to six athletes for each one and refer back to the priorities established for them in their IPPs to ensure they’re getting some progression in those different priority areas. We had a breakthrough with one of our coaches where he said, ‘OK, now it makes total sense why we wouldn’t just send someone to Tahiti if they haven’t gone left all year or they don’t have the right safety equipment.’ These are all things we can put in an IPP and make sure they’re done before we send them to a location they’re not ready for.”

Such selection decisions also apply to which boards surfers decide to put in their arsenal and other details about their equipment. “Smartabase helps us manage equipment knowledge, the relationship with shapers, and board planning and selection details in the IPPs, which ensures the surfer has the right boards for the conditions on the day of a contest,” Haakonssen said.

Using the unified Smartabase platform to manage both medical and performance data gives coaches a more proactive and comprehensive way to stay up to date on their athletes’ status. “With the shared communication function in Smartabase, doctors and physios can put notes up with content that’s not confidential, but that other service providers and coaches need to see,” Haakonssen said. “That’s been a useful tool, particularly given that we are spread out all over the place. It’s a good way to flag things we might not be aware of because we’re not with our athletes all the time.” This level of transparency will be extended when Surfing Australia starts incorporating the results of an annual medical screening into each athlete’s profile in Smartabase.

As Surfing Australia advances its data management plan, it’s looking to monitor surfers’ loads in the water and on dry land. This could include utilizing smartwatches that log session duration, amount of paddling, number of waves caught, rate of perceived exertion, and more while athletes are in the ocean or wave pool. This could then be collated with workouts that develop surfers’ strength, power, stability, and other physical qualities.

“In a perfect world, we’d have some type of wearable that captures what they’re doing in the water, at least at a really high level. In the gym, we have TeamBuildr, and could bring those together to try and have some sort of total load quantification,” Haakonssen said.

## About

 **SMARTABASE**

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A global company founded in Brisbane, Australia in 2003 with international headquarters in Colorado and London, Smartabase is a global leader in using data to optimize human performance. As a performance and analytics platform, Smartabase is the source of truth for national sporting federations, Olympic committees, many of the world’s highest-profile sporting teams, military research and operational wings, and performing arts organizations. For more information, contact us at [sales@fusionsport.com](mailto:sales@fusionsport.com).